

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 16, 2015

His Royal Highness King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz  
Royal Court  
Riyadh  
11111, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Dear King Abdullah:

We write to express our deep concern regarding a pattern in Saudi Arabia of using obsolete blasphemy and apostasy laws to suppress the fundamental human rights of Saudi citizens. In particular, we are dismayed by the public flogging of Saudi citizen Raif Badawi, who was sentenced to ten years in jail and 1,000 lashes for apparently launching a website that suggested a peaceful discussion about religion. Mr. Badawi already endured a first round of 50 lashes last week, and is scheduled for a total of 20 such rounds of public flogging.

Mr. Badawi's wife recently told Amnesty International that she fears her husband may not be able to physically withstand another round of lashing, noting that he is "in a lot of pain after his flogging, his health is poor, and I'm concerned he will not be able to cope with another round of lashes." We share Mr. Badawi's family's concern that he might be irreparably injured or killed from further floggings – something no human being should face for expressing peaceful dialogue about religion or politics.

At a time that the world is wrestling with and mourning violence committed in the name of religious intolerance, such an example of state-sanctioned violence against peaceful religious dialogue is highly troubling and helps legitimize the extremist view that violence is a justified response to the free exercise of speech and religion. As such, we urge the immediate halt to this barbaric punishment and the immediate release of Mr. Badawi.

We similarly urge the release of Mr. Badawi's lawyer -- prominent human rights activist Waleed Abu al-Khair, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison by the Specialized Criminal Court in Jeddah. Mr. Abu al-Khair's conviction on dubious charges only further sends the message that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will repress peaceful political dissident.

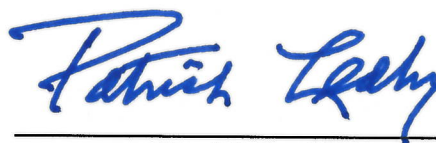
Both Mr. Badawi's and Mr. Abu al-Khari's punishments have been widely condemned around the world by prominent human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, as well as by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. And the United States Department of State recently called Badawi's sentence "inhuman" and urged your government to cancel this "brutal punishment." In fact, this is an important time for Saudi Arabia to play a leadership role in the region and world in setting an example of religious tolerance and civility.

We value the important partnership between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on many critical issues. However, any further violence or criminal proceedings against Saudi citizens exercising nonviolent freedoms of speech and religion will unfortunately be a source of continued divergence between our two countries.

Sincerely,



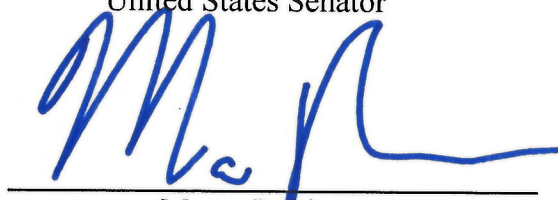
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Marco Rubio  
United States Senator



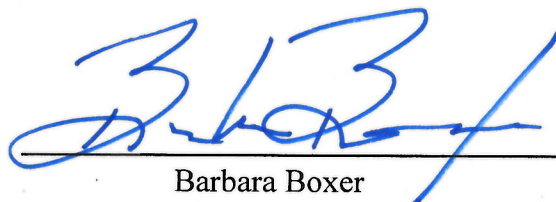
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Mark Kirk  
United States Senator



Barbara Boxer  
United States Senator